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ABSTRACT

Developed in conjunction with a graduate course and used in classrooms with all types of learners, this paper presents a 6-week unit of study on slavery based on two adolescent novels--"NIGHTJOHN" by Gary Paulson and "My Name Is not Angelica" by Scott O'Dell. After a brief introduction to the unit, the paper presents the 14 activities of the unit: discussion of what the titles of the novels might mean; reader response journals; use of dialect in the novels; research on the historical facts in the novels; response to and debate on the issue of whether students would take in fugitive slaves; main character descriptions; description of moments of conflict in the novels; extrapolation of a scene from each novel; discussion of themes in the novels such as death, life, marriage, illness, and freedom; composition of a "riddle poem" for the theme of the novels; analysis of hidden themes in slave songs; creation of diary entries from the point of view of a slave; creation of a play using the diary entries; and a field trip. Appendixes contain 10 reader response journal ideas, steps in the slavery novel research project, and the outline of the main character sketch. (RS)

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ED 413 613

# SIX WEEK SLAVERY NOVEL UNIT

## INTRODUCTION

My name is Darolyn "Lyn" Jones, and I am a middle school Language Arts teacher. I wrote this unit in conjunction with a graduate course I took. However, I have also used this unit in my classroom as well. I have used it with all types of learners, from resource readers to gifted and talented students.

## NOVELS REQUIRED

The two required adolescent novels for this course is: NIGHTJOHN by Gary Paulson and My Name is not Angelica by Scott O'Dell. I chose the two novels because they are historically accurate and present the many issues of slavery in America. NIGHTJOHN is about a girl, Samy, working on a plantation in the South who is determined to learn to read. NIGHTJOHN is a slave who has escaped, but who comes back at night to help Samy and the other children learn to read. My Name is Not Angelica by Scott O'Dell shows slavery outside of America, hence offering another perspective of how other countries were involved in the institution of slavery. Secondly, it illustrates the life a slave had before he or she was torn away and taken on the terrible journey to the auction block and plantation.

## DIFFICULT ACTIVITIES

For the activities that ask students to research and debate, this requires that students have already mastered these skills. If your students have not, you may want to discuss the research and debate processes, manipulate these activities to fit your students, or create models of what you would like to see.

## GIFTED AND TALEDTED STUDENTS

For more advanced readers, teachers may wish to add non-fiction titles as well, such as biographies about slaves.

## LENGTH OF UNIT

Depending on the time teachers have students in class and the type of readers teachers have in class, this unit could be three to six weeks. Many middle schools in Indiana still have two periods allotted for Language Arts, one designated as a Reading course and one as English course. If teachers have students twice a day, this unit could be completed in three weeks. If teachers only have students once a day, this unit could take six weeks.

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**NIGHTJOHN by Gary Paulson**
**My Name is Not Angelica by Scott O'Dell**

1. Ask students to read the two novel titles and predict what each story may be about. Share our predictions as a class. Next, offer a book talk over each novel. Share portions of plot and climax with students. Finally, allow students to choose either NIGHTJOHN by Gary Paulson or My Name is Not Angelica by Scott O'Dell.

2. As students are reading their novel, ask them to choose and complete three reader response options in their journals. (Appendix A)

3. Explain to students that there are several dialectal terms in their novels, NIGHTJOHN and My Name is Not Angelica. As students read and encounter these terms, have them define them in their own words. The words to define are witchin, breeders, hand, marked, quarters, and broken. Also, ask students to speculate and explain how these terms came to be used by slaves.

4. When students have completed their novels and have become knowledgeable about the facts of their novel, ask them to examine and research their novel's historical facts to see if the author did his homework regarding the portrayal of the character and situation. Teachers, guide students through these questions: Is the institution of slavery presented accurately? Do the characters behave consistently with what is known to be true? Was the character stereotypical or was the information presented accurately in the context of the character's life? Consider what you know and have learned about slavery. Could this have happened? (Appendix B)

5. Ask students to respond and debate the following issue. The people who opened their home to the runaways were breaking the Fugitive Slave Law. If caught, they would have faced the possibility of a prison sentence, plus large fines. Would you have broken the law and opened your home to the slaves? Would your answer change if you had a family to consider?

6. Group students according to their novel choice. Then, ask students to list as many appropriate adjectives as they can think of to describe their character. Finally, using the adjectives and what students learned from the discussion while in their groups, ask students to individually complete the following sentences describing main characters. (Appendix C)

7. Ask students to choose a moment of conflict in their novels. Find a quote from the novel that describes this moment. Then, sketch this moment and place the quote on the sketch.

8. Extrapolate a scene from each novel. In NIGHTJOHN, extrapolate the scene where Mammy is about to get whipped for Sarny's writing and Nightjohn steps in to save her, but suffers a worse fate. In My Name is Not Angelica, extrapolate the scene at the end where the slaves final revolt is to jump over the cliff and commit suicide, but Raisha can not jump. Ask students to answer the following questions for their respective novel. How does the scene look in your mind's eye? How does it make you think the characters involved are feeling? Were the characters involved right or wrong? Allow students to respond, agree, or disagree with one another.

9. Ask students what their novel's author seems to think or say about the following topics: Death, Life, Marriage, Illness, Freedom, and Justice. After students respond, engage them in a discussion about theme, and how these statements can be used to reflect the themes of each novel.

10. Once themes from each novel have been discussed, ask students to compose a riddle poem for the theme of their novel. Also, ask students to compose a riddle poem over their favorite character in their novel.

11. In mixed groups of three or four (combine students who read NIGHTJOHN and My Name is Not Angelica), choose lyrics from one of the listed slave songs to explain how these songs may have had hidden meaning and been used as secret codes. The song titles are as follows: "Go Down Moses," "We Shall Overcome," and "I'm On My Way to the Freedom Land." In these same groups, share how the slaves in each novel used secret codes.

12. Ask students to create ten diary entries in their journal over the following questions: Imagine you are a slave working on a plantation. Describe a typical day in detail from morning until night. How does you master treat you? What type of work do you do? How do you feel about doing it? What are your innermost thoughts? Do you live with your parents and brothers and sisters, or are you separated? Do you have free time? Do you have thoughts about running away? How do you feel about getting an education? Have you ever been caught trying to learn to read? Have you ever been caught trying to help fugitive slaves? What happened?

13. As a culminating activity, group students and ask them to create a play using the diary entries as a basis for a script. They should choose a setting, use all of their characters, interweaving their lives, and reflect the themes inherent in the novels they read. They may use dance and music in their plays if they choose.

14. Take students on a field trip to either the Levi Coffin House in Cincinnati, Ohio or Fountain City, Indiana.

## READER RESPONSE JOURNAL IDEAS

**Reading Journal Entries:** I expect you to complete three entries for your novel. You may choose any three options. All entries should include the following information in the top right hand corner of your journal: Date, Title of Novel, Author of Book, and Option Number.

Your written entries are your thoughts, interpretations, and questions to what you are reading. Your comments may also be in response to the author's writing style.

1. **Quote or Point Out:** Quote or point out a part of the book that you think is an example of good writing. What do you like about this quote? What makes you feel this is a good quote?

2. **Experiences or Memories:** How does this book make you think or feel? Does this book remind you of anything? What comes to mind? What kinds of ideas does this book give you for writing?

3. **Reactions:** Do you love/hate/can't stop reading this book? What makes you feel that way?

4. **Questions:** What confuses you? What don't you understand? Why did the author do something a particular way? What would you have done if you were the writer?

5. **Evaluation:** How does this book compare to others you have read? What makes it an effective or ineffective piece of reading?

6. **Summarize:** Summarize what you have read today. One of the first steps to becoming a good reader is being able to recall what you have read.

7. **Connections:** Does a character remind you of someone you know? Does the plot seem similar to the plot of another book, movie, or television show? Show how these likenesses exist.

8. **Connections:** What advice would you give the protagonist if he/she were your best friend? Why would you give them that advice?

9. **The Author:** What is he trying to do? How is he trying to make you feel? Is he trying to influence you? Is the author using personal experience as a reference for his writing?

10. **Speculate:** Try to guess what is going to happen next in your book. Discuss why you think this is going to happen.

**APPENDIX A**

**SLAVERY NOVEL RESEARCH PROJECT**
**NIGHTJOHN by Gary Paulson**
**My Name is Not Angelica by Scott O'Dell**

1. Choose a partner who read the same book as you.

2. Research the setting and portrayal of characters in your novel. Find out if your author did his or her homework regarding the portrayal of the institution of slavery.

3. Consider the following questions: Is the institution of slavery presented accurately? Consider what you know and have learned about slavery. Could this have happened? Do the characters act they way real slaves did? Are the main characters stereotypical?

4. Prepare your answers in a joint written analysis. Your paper should include your names in the top right hand corner, a title, and a bibliography. Your paper should be typed and two pages in length.

5. You must use at least three different sources for this research project.

6. Examine the following websites:
   http://lcweb.loc.gov/exhibits/african/intro.html,
   http://www.nps.gov/undergroundrr/contents.htm,
   http://dolphin.upenn.edu/~vision/vis/Mar-95/5284.html

7. If you find other useful websites, list those below.

**PARTNER'S NAME:** _____
**PARTNER'S PHONE NUMBER:** _____

**WEBSITES OF INTEREST:**

**APPENDIX B**

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**CHARACTER SKETCH**
**NIGHTJOHN by Gary Paulson**
**My Name is Not Angelica by Scott O'Dell**

- Choose either Samy in NIGHTJOHN or Raisha in My Name is Not Angelica. Circle your character's name.
- Complete the following sentences for either Samy or Raisha.

1. Samy/ Raisha thinks...

2. Samy/Raisha sees life...

3. Samy/Raisha treats people she likes...

4. Samy/Raisha feels...

6. Samy/Raisha acts like...

8. Samy/ Raisha likes...

9. Samy/Raisha dislikes...

10. Samy/Raisha gives...

11. Samy/Raisha values...

12. Samy/Raisha learns...

12. Samy's/Raisha's future will be...

**APPENDIX C**

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